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ABSTRACT

In the early 1950's, economist Beardsley Ruml recommended that colleges and universities bring faculty salaries into comparable categories with other professionals by increasing the student-faculty ratio to twenty to one. Such a suggestion was greeted with enthusiasm from trustees and many administrators, but faculty were totally against the proposal from the outset. The vast enrollment growth in higher education of the late 1950's and 1960's enabled college and university professors to demand higher salaries without having to increase their workloads. Now, however, dwindling enrollments, especially in private colleges and universities, are causing trustees to reconsider Ruml's plan in spite of opposition from the faculty. Although the trustees should definitely consult faculty as to their feelings, the trustees must inevitably have the last word in the situation. The trustees must decide the most feasible financial plan for attracting students as well as faculty, and then they must act on the decision. (HS)

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TRUSTEES AND THE FACULTY - THE RUML REPORT REVISITED

by

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Chairman, Board of Trustees

Kalamazoo College

Session:

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Trustees and the Faculty - The Ruml Report Revisited

I

I am grateful for the opportunity offered by Mr. John Gillis to speak to you on this particular topic. Twenty years ago I visited Beardsley Ruml in his New York office, and listened and took notes as he explained his proposals for putting colleges and universities on a solid business footing, in order to bring them out of the perpetual crisis in which they seemed to operate. I found him to be a fascinating person, profane and blunt, but flexible, more so perhaps than the character of his writings had suggested.

Directly after this 1953 visit, Kalamazoo College adopted a modified version of the Ruml four-part budget, and in 1961 took up another of his proposals by moving to year-around, four-quarter operation. Later in this paper I will tell you how these steps worked out.

You will recall that Mr. Ruml was one of the nation's leading economists and a man of many interests. In 1943 he persuaded the Treasury Department to adopt his pay-as-you-go income tax plan; in the late 40's he was advisor to the Puerto Rican Government as it began the successful "Operation Bootstrap"; and now in the 50's he was bringing his considerable talent for analysis and innovation to the assistance of higher education, of which he himself had been an integral

part. For eight years, right up until his death in 1960, he was to explore and refine his ideas on academic governance.

What motivated Ruml in making these studies is indicated by the titles of his papers. In 1952 he wrote on "Business Financial Co-operation with the Liberal Arts Colleges" [1], in 1955 on "Teaching Salaries Then and Now" [2], in 1957 on "Pay and the Professor" [3], and in 1959 he came out with his "Memo to a College Trustee" [4].

His first concern was that colleges could not successfully seek financial help from business unless college operations themselves were conducted in a reasonably business-like manner. His second concern, which stemmed from the first, was the low pay scale for teachers. He and Sidney Tickton, working for the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation, reviewed the pay scales for the past 50 years and discovered that the college teacher did indeed have equivalent economic status with that of other professions in the early 1900's, when "a first class professor was considered economically as worthy as a first class anybody else who was working for pay and not risking his own capital". But over the years the teachers' position declined until, by 1955, it had fallen to about one-third of those in other professions. He laid this decline to the teaching program itself. "The teaching program", he wrote, "is incredibly inefficient. The pay that the professor gets today is the direct consequence of what he earns, now as compared with then. The number of courses offered has doubled and trebled, even though the units required for graduation remain the same. The number of courses offered per member of the faculty has dropped by a third. The ratio of students to teachers is also down a third - it now stands at about ten to one, sometimes less."

Ruml then went on to show that salary scales could be brought back to parity with other professions by reconstructing the curriculum and by reforming the whole operation of the college. He proposed doing away with medium-sized classes and concentrating on large lectures and small seminars, and showed by models how this would work out. These models were built on a student-faculty ratio of 20 to 1, and produced savings so large as to supply most of the salary increases which he felt that teachers of that time should have. "What Ruml was advocating in effect was a pay-as-you-go plan for the academy." [5)]

(I think back to the large lecture courses of my days in college. One of them, taught by Charles Seymour on "The French Revolution and Napoleon", was the finest course I ever took, and it jammed a lecture hall with 250 students. Had that course been broken up into 10 sections of 25 each - the current practice - the cost to the university would have been several times Professor Seymour's salary, and the course would probably not have been worth taking.)

In 1971 Dr. James D. Koerner of the Sloan Foundation reviewed the effect that Ruml has had on college governance. [5)] "On the whole", he said, "Ruml was received with stony silence or muted hostility by most professors and by some administrators. He was received with warmth and gratitude by most trustees and by many administrators. But regardless of how he was received by anybody, he exerted no practical influence on the operation of American colleges and universities. His Report is a classic illustration of the capacity of our Gargantuan system of higher education to absorb, like an immense

sponge, criticism and proposals for reform and to remain completely unaffected by them. Scarcely a single institution, as Oscar Wilde remarked in another context, 'was led astray into the path of virtue' by anything Ruml had said."

What saved the faculties from having to follow the rules of Ruml in getting their salary increases was the tremendous enrollment growth that took place between 1957 and 1970, creating a bull market for teachers. Qualified college teachers were in extremely short supply, and they could get anything they wanted. They were bargained for with higher salaries, a host of fringe benefits, even with reduced work loads. But how was this to be paid for, if not by the improved productivity of teachers on which Ruml had based his formulas? It was paid for by passing the costs on to students and, in the public institutions, by obtaining additional subsidies from the legislatures. Outside money was brought in to meet the soaring costs, while the teachers, with renewed clout, became more and more demanding. In our own institution the cost of the instructional budget, calculated on a per-student per-year basis, rose from $300 to $1500. This means that teaching costs rose 8 times as much as did the cost of living during the same period.

Things of course were building up to a financial crisis, and this was visible by 1968. The story of how the bubbles began bursting has been told incisively by William Jellema in a study called "The Red and the Black" [6], published by this Association. Using the data supplied by a surprising three-quarters of the 750 private, four-year accredited institutions of higher learning in this country, he established that by

1970 the average private institution in every region of the country was showing operating deficits, "was firmly in the red". Trouble had now started.

This answers the question as to when it is going to happen. It has already happened. The private colleges had priced themselves out of the market by the opening of the academic year of 1969-70. In that year they could not find enough students with both money and ability [7] to fill their schools. They had to begin buying students with money they did not have, or lower their standards, or operate at less than full capacity, and some of them did all three. The faculties had managed to bring their salaries back to parity with other professions without following the productivity rules of Ruml, and their institutions were starting to crumble financially.

Now let us leave Ruml and the Professor's Pay and turn to two developments of the 1960's which were not anticipated, which for the most part came on insidiously, and which in fact seem not to be fully recognized today. I shall consider them separately.

1. The falling birthrate from 1958 through 1968 and a predicted further drop beginning in 1972. The year 1958 was the starting point for both events. In that year the forecasters were loudest in their predictions that college enrollments would double by 1970 and would treble soon after, and they thus triggered the vast campus expansion of the 1960's. But it was also the first year of a decline in the birthrate.

   For eleven years the birthrate fell in the United States, posting a total decline of 30% by the end of 1968. [8]. The actual

number of live births at the end of the period was down by 17%, because the "rate" was applied to a rising total population, but even a 17% fall can give a thundering jolt to a nation which has built its whole culture on expansion.

After 1968 the birthrate steadied, and even climbed a little, but in 1971 a Census Bureau interview program with married women 18 to 24 years [9] old disclosed that it was their intention to bring the birthrate down still lower. That interview method of forecasting is reported by the New York Times [10] to have an uncanny accuracy, yielding predictions within 1/10 of a baby. Right on target, the rate started down again in 1972.

What does this mean to colleges and universities? Just this: Beginning in 1976 and continuing through 1986 there will be fewer Americans reaching the age of 18 and thus ready to fill the freshman classes than there were the year before. Four years later, in 1990, a new shortage of freshmen will appear which may well extend on toward the year 2000.

2. The apparent over-expansion of college space during the 1960's. It wasn't planned that way, in fact it probably wasn't planned at all, but the rush to provide the space for the doubled and tripled enrollments predicted in the 1950's probably went too far, because by the end of the decade there appeared to be more campus space than there were students to fill it.

A nationwide shortage of students was perceptible in 1970-71 when admissions officers in the private colleges checked their spring positions, and the shortage grew more definite in 1971-72

and in 1972-73. It was soon observed in the public institutions as well: Western Michigan University, which was our State's enrollment leader during the expansion period, fell 600 below projection in 1971-72, and declined in absolute numbers by 700 in 1972-73, when the declining enrollments began drawing headlines in local, state and national press. [11] Even the junior colleges are now feeling the shortage, if that is what their recent turn to advertising means.

Important: the 18-year-olds entering college during this period were born during a steady or slightly rising birthrate.

It may be dangerous to say categorically that too much campus space has already been built, because student postures change, and there is a flow as well as an ebb in their tidal behavior, but from where we sit, on the edge of the beach, this appears to be true.

Looking especially at the private four-year colleges and universities, the ability to capture full enrollments now faces four other challenges in addition to the falling birthrate:

1. The continuing expansion of the public 4-year campuses. A single example is little Grand Valley State College, only 12 years old, which has just announced plans to grow from 4000 enrollment to 10,000 by 1980 and to 20,000 thereafter.
2. The movement of liberal arts students toward the community colleges for the first 2 years because of their convenience and cheapness.

3. Changes in academic patterns, such as the possible elimination of the freshman year because it duplicates so much that is taught in high school; or the plan by medical schools to award the degree 6 years after high school, by shaving a year from college and a year from medicine.

4. The increasing difference in charges between the private and the public colleges, created by the growing subsidies of the states to their own institutions. Using Michigan figures, the annual subsidy is now above $1000 per student for undergraduates, and much more for graduates.

What happens to a private college or university when it finds that it cannot fill its enrollment? Deficits, first. And then what? Let's look at New York University.[12] After exhausting its uncommitted endowment in covering the growing deficits, a task force of its own deans has decreed that it must now live with a one-third decrease in undergraduate enrollment and must not raise student charges again for at least 4 years! Just think of running your own school on those terms: one-third smaller enrollment, student charges frozen. Could you do it?

II

This concludes the first portion of the paper, in which we have revisited Beardsley Ruml, and have measured his period against ours, with disturbing results. In fact, the pressures for a change in the system seem far more powerful now than in his time, although he felt that they were compelling enough then.

I shall move now to the other half of the assigned topic, "Trustees and the Faculty". It should be recognized at the outset that these two groups are poles apart in their viewpoints, with faculty seeing the college problems from one position and trustees from quite a different one. My remarks are not going to be earth-shaking, nor very scholarly, they are simply observations drawn from experience, but they may arouse discussion, and that is one reason for our being here this afternoon.

The collective faculty is very resistant to change, but then so is the collective medical profession, or the collective anything else. Groups of similar people tend to protect both their identities and their habits. Piet Hein has stated this in one of his short and pithy Grooks [13]:

> Men, said the Devil
> are good to their brothers:
> they don't want to mend
> their own ways but each others.

I think it would be unfair to expect change to come from faculty, whereas with trustees change is a basic ingredient of their trust responsibility: they must listen, they must read, they must dream in the field of ideas, and then they must take the appropriate actions. They should remember, too, that it is impossible for a college to be any stronger than its governing board.

In illustration of this, we find on looking back on 20 years at Kalamazoo College, that both the initiative and the decision for almost all of our innovations came from the Board of Trustees, and I give you these examples: the establishment of a retirement rule at age 72 for trustees; the negotiation for a new charter to free the college from the restrictive rules of the nineteenth century Baptists; the investigation and the adoption of the Ruml Plan of budgeting; the move to year-around operation; the refusal to construct buildings until new money was raised to pay for them; the writing of a new employment agreement to replace the standard AAUP formula; the exploration and adoption of a foreign study program - these all came from the Trustees. The faculty, of course, was involved after the initiative and decision had been taken, when they were often indispensable. Our local AAUP chapter cooperated in putting the final touches on the employment plan, and gave it approval. The complex plan for operating on a four-quarter schedule was developed in its entirety by the academic dean and the faculty members that he chose to help him.

I think what works least well in trustee-faculty relations are joint committees, especially those for planning. The conflict of interest is very high, the area of common knowledge is low, and the two sides, trustees and faculty, square off in the British debating tactic of

talking around the subject. We have such a college planning committee now, 3 trustees, 3 administrators, 3 teachers, and it has got no farther in three years of so-called planning than to try unsuccessfully to define what a teacher's work load means. The same fine phrases keep popping up, and everything stands still.

I once asked Gladys Wrigley, the dean of scientific editors, what she does first when she starts to edit a contributor's manuscript for her Geographical Review, and she replied, "why, first I take out all of the author's favorite phrases". Favorite phrases have all of their meaning rubbed off by repetition, and then they act like concrete shoes, serving only to prevent progress. One phrase which we hear frequently is "the quality college", and it appears whenever an economy move is brought up. "Don't do anything to harm the quality college", someone says. Another concerns the student-faculty ratio: "You cannot go above 14 to 1", as though that were a passage from the Bible. Still another: "Don't do anything to hurt faculty morale". This one prompted a reply from Dr. Harold T. Smith, the business manager who introduced us to Ruml: "For twelve years", he said, "I had to cut budgets, and I never found any way to cut budgets and still keep up faculty morale". These favorite phrases must be taken out, to go forward at all.

I also have an aversion for faculty self-studies, of which I have watched several, in different organizations. They are expensive, they are wasteful of thousands of man-hours, and they are singularly uniform in their final conclusion, "we are doing fine, and we should keep things going just the way they are".

If joint trustee-faculty committees are not the answer to effective change, then what is? In our experience it has been one man rather than a committee, and that man was either the president or the academic dean, or, infrequently, an individual trustee with a flair for negotiation: one-on-one seems to work much better than five-on-five. Ingenuity is essential, particularly in finding other ways to the goal than the prescribed one, and it is here that faculty personnel seem to come forward with their best enthusiasms. They love to try to figure things out.

Did Ruml work? I promised earlier to tell you how we came out at Kalamazoo College with his budget proposals, which were adopted in the spring of 1953. We assigned an identifiable piece of income, called tuition, to pay the teachers and their related departmental costs, and thus tried to work up a personal interest among the faculty to improve productivity, knowing that salary runs inversely to faculty size, that the pot is divided among the people. The plan proceeded well under an academic dean who was aggressive and committed, and who brought the student-faculty ratio up to the neighborhood of 17 to 1, where it levelled off even in his capable hands. Eight years and three deans later, it had fallen to about 13 or 14 to 1, which is the level today. So we must admit that the Plan, by itself and in all its logic, does not automatically gain the active support of the collective faculty, nor that of the departmental chairmen. To succeed, it requires determined leadership from outside of the faculty organization.

Another of Ruml's proposals was the adoption of year-around operation in order to gain the fullest use of the investment in plant.

We made this move in 1961, choosing a 4-quarter structure of eleven weeks each, with both students and faculty attending three of the four quarters under a complex in-and-out rotation. This has worked out satisfactorily, and it saves money. Our charges to students stand about $600 a year lower than the average college of our class, half of the saving being traceable to the year-around operation, the other half to the absence of long-term debt.

In considering the subject of change, or its opposite side, stability, we should not overlook the useful part played by the college or university attorney. As these attorneys watched the growing importance of legal problems in educational governance, they formed in 1961 The National Association of College and University Attorneys, which now numbers 600 institutions and 900 lawyer members. They hold annual 3-day meetings, publish their proceedings, and at any time of the year confer with one another by telephone. It was this active, inter-related group that taught Administrators to avoid ugly confrontations by the use of the court-ordered injunction, and that advised Boards against electing faculty trustees because of the strong conflict of interest. They have become a valuable asset in college governance, and should be consulted in advance of any serious change.

In another quarter, a new and effective leverage for change has appeared in the form of student activism. After the violent phase, which passed us by with little damage, our students set out to reform the social arrangements on campus, and succeeded in obtaining mixed dormitories and much freer visiting privileges. Now they are working on the curriculum, and on becoming a part of the judging apparatus of teaching excellence. Their persistence, their reasonableness, even

their occasional rudeness, are finding attentive interest among both faculty and trustees.

In our situation, there is still another influence working to keep the faculty malleable, which derives from our Foreign Study Program. Fresh from 6 months in foreign universities, the returning students are bubbling with ideas for change. They seem truly to have matured more rapidly during their half-year abroad than during their preceding two years on campus. And the faculty is alert to this.

A bright spot in student-faculty-trustee co-operation was the recent choosing of a new president. Both students and faculty petitioned to have an active role in the selection, and the Committee, 6 trustees in number, agreed to let the two groups, acting separately, screen the data on all applicants, some 400 in number, and come up with recommendations. First they reduced the lists to 60, and then made the cut to 10. With an overlap of 4 names, the combined recommendations of students and faculty numbered 16, and these persons were contacted for interview by the Trustee Committee. Fortunately, a satisfactory choice was found in this list.

I still hear praise from the trustee members (Earl Bramblett, personnel director of General Motors, was one) for the prodigious labor of both the faculty and the student groups during the presidential search, and for their great assistance to the Selection Committee. But note again that they did their work separately, not in combination, and note also that the trustees retained the authority of final decision.

Am I giving too much authority to Trustees? Let's check again with Rumi: "Since the liberal college,", he wrote, is a body

corporate in the public interest, the powers, privileges and immunities of its Trustees are in fact duties and obligations. These rights are given by the charter to the Trustees in order that they may be exercised, and exercised by these particular persons or by their lawful successors. A single Trustee or the Trustees collectively may abdicate from their position of authority, but they cannot annul it; they may vacate their posts, but they cannot destroy them; they may delegate activities and decisions, but they cannot thereby avoid their own responsibilities."

That says it pretty well.

May I show you, however, a different approach to the question of who is to be in charge, and of what? This approach I like even better than the legal one, because it works to enhance the dignity of both groups. The same kind of quarrel over authority turns up in a typical geographical exploration, especially one to the Antarctic Continent. Who is to be in charge of this expedition, the scientists or the explorers? In the older expeditions there wasn't any problem, because there weren't any scientists, or at least there weren't any organized scientific teams. Since 1900, however, some 80 or 90 Antarctic expeditions have been mounted, mostly in the cause of science, and many have got into trouble during the planning stage, or later on in the field. One of the earliest and most famous disagreements occurred in 1901 when the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society, two of England's most prestigious organizations, fought out the question of command. When the geographers finally won, the chief scientist quit and a new team had to be formed. [14)]

Dr. Laurence M. Gould knew about this when he became chairman of the United States Antarctic Committee and formed up the great team of scientists which went to Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58. To forestall trouble, he tramped across Washington and called on Admiral Dufek, the leader of the Navy's task force which was to transport, clothe, shelter, feed,and sometimes rescue those scientists, and he said, "Admiral, I will not try to run the United States Navy, and you will not interfere with my scientists". That was the only rule they made, and it is still the guiding principle of the most successful co-operative venture in Antarctic history. The scientists draw up their own programs, timetables and needs. The Navy administers to these in such ways as it knows how. But when a conflict arises between the scientist's desires and the Navy's abilities, it is the Navy that decides. If the weather is not right, or the load is too heavy, or the people are too numerous, the Navy says no. And this is precisely the point at which I feel that trustees should take over in college and university operation. If the financial climate is poor, if the curricular offerings are too heavy, if the teachers are too many and are teaching too few students, the trustees should exercise their veto power.

Let's be honest with ourselves: the faculty needs a board of trustees and its administrative arm. The faculty would not be there if trustees and administration had not hired architects, raised money, put up buildings, provided janitors, bought heating oil, opened doors in the morning and locked them at night, cooked the meals, and, yes, gone out and recruited the students that they are teaching. And both faculty and administration need a board of trustees with the authority,

and the courage, to say no in choosing easy ways out of hard problems. The faculty needs trustees and administrators in exactly the same way that Antarctic scientists need the United States Navy. And they could scarcely improve on Larry Gould's method of getting along together by leaving each other alone.

Prescription for the survival of the private colleges in a period of dwindling student availability

With each college it is different, and yet it is the same. Each one needs to keep its charges within student reach, and yet present a situation, a program, or some other feature which will attract students to this college. But action is urgent: "What we cannot do," says New York University's Task Force, "is to operate as we have been doing on the basis of hopes or assertion that salvation is 'just around the corner'. What is just around the corner is insolvency, unless our actions are sufficiently sweeping and imaginative."

In holding down costs in order to bring in students, it seems to be a matter of taking all of the options that may be open, of which there are several besides the Ruml Plan, remembering that most of them are one-time steps which cannot be repeated. The following list is suggestive, although surely not complete. Alongside each item an approximation is given of the savings available on a per-student per-year basis, using Kalamazoo College with its present enrollment of 1375 as a platform. The figures are not precise.

	Savings per-student per-year
1. Year-around-operation	$ 300
2. Absence of debt	$ 300
3. Subsidy by the State at 1/2 the subsidy given to its state colleges	$ 500
4. Doubling the endowment (from $12 million to $24 million)	$ 110
5. Reduction of enrollment to 1300	(a small loss)
6. Ruml's 20:1 student-faculty ratio	$400 - $500

Explanations:

1. Year-around operation: the campus is in use 44 weeks a year instead of 33.

2. Absence of debt: the average college of our class has an indebtedness on plant of around $4,000,000 and a debt charge to students of $250 - $300.

3. Subsidy by the State at 1/2 the subsidy given to its state colleges. Our proposal for this, which has been presented to the Governor, is reproduced in an appendix. [15)]

4. Doubling the endowment, up from $12 million to $24 million. Notice how small a reduction in student charges is created here. We assume that 3/4 of the endowment is restricted to specified purposes, leaving only 1/4 available to general-operation.
$3 million x .05 = $150,000 income ÷ 1375 students = $110 per student

5. Reduction of enrollment - Savings, none; probably a loss. But I believe that survival is more likely in the college that budgets for modest enrollments than in the one which gambles on its ability to beat out the pack.

6. Ruml's 20:1 student-faculty ratio.

Returning to this proposal, we have come full-circle, right back to 1952. I recommend to each of you, as I am doing to our own trustees, that "Memo to a College Trustee" again be thoughtfully studied. Therein is suggested the means to lower student charges by $400 to $500 or more, and this step, added to whatever other options are available to you, may well be the vital factor in the survival of your institution in the period of diminishing student availability.

In conclusion, may I observe that the adoption of this last recommendation would finally bring the Irresistible Force into direct contact with the Immovable Object. They have been avoiding each other for too long a time.

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